

A SERMON FOR THE MOST MISERABLE OF MEN NO. 853

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 31, 1869,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"My soul refused to be comforted."
Psalm 77:2.*

In this refusal to be comforted, David is not to be imitated. His experience in this instance is recorded rather as a *warning* than as an example; here is no justification for those professors who when they suffer bereavements or temporal losses, repine bitterly and reject every consoling thought. We have known persons who made mourning for departed ones the main business of life years after the beloved relative had entered into rest; like the heathen, they worship the spirits of the dead. The sufferer has a right to mourn, a right which Jesus Christ has sealed, for, "Jesus wept," but that right is abused into a wrong when protracted sorrow poisons the springs of the heart, and unfits the weeper for the duties of daily life; there is a "hitherto" beyond which the floods of grief may not lawfully advance. "What?" said the Quaker, to one who wore the weeds of mourning many years after the death of her child, and declared that she had suffered a blow from which she should never rally—"What? Friend, have you not forgiven God yet?" Much of unholy rebellion against the Most High will be found as sediment at the bottom of most tear bottles; sullen repining and protracted lamentation indicate the existence of *idolatry* in the heart. Surely the beloved object must have been enshrined in that throne of the heart which is the Lord's alone, or else the taking away of the beloved object, though it caused poignant sorrow, would not have excited such an unsubmissive spirit! Should it not be the endeavor of God's children to avoid excessive and continued grief because it verges so closely upon the two deadly sins of rebellion and idolatry? Sorrow deserves sympathy, but when it springs from a lack of resignation, it merits censure! When believers refuse to be comforted, they act as mere worldlings might do with some excuse, for when unbelievers lose earthly comforts they lose their all; but for the Christian to pine and sigh in inconsolable anguish over the loss of a *creature* good is to belie his profession, and degrade his name; he believes of his trial that the Lord has done it; he calls God his Father; he knows that *all* things work together for good; he is persuaded that a far more exceedingly and eternal weight of glory is being worked out for him; how, then, can he sit down in sullen silence and say, "I will not be comforted"? Surely, then, the truths of God which he professes to believe have never entered into his soul! He *must* be a mere speculative theorizer, and not a sincere believer! Beloved, shame on us if with such a faith as ours we do not play the man! If the furnace is hot, let our faith be strong; if the burden is heavy, let our patience be enduring; let us practically admit that He who lends has a right to reclaim His own—and as we blessed the *giving*, so let us bless the *taking* hand. At all times let us praise the Lord our God! Though He slays us, let us trust Him; much more, let us bless Him when He only uses the rod.

Our text however, might very fittingly describe individuals who although free from outward trial or bereavement, are subject to deep depression of spirits. There are times with the brightest-eyed Christians when they can hardly brush the tears away. Strong faith and joyous hope at times subside into a fearfulness which is scarcely able to keep the spark of hope and faith alive in the soul. Yes, I think the more rejoicing a man is at one time, the more sorrowful he will be at others; they who mount highest descend lowest. There are cold-blooded individuals who neither rejoice with unspeakable joy nor groan with unutterable anguish. But others of a more excitable temperament, capable of lofty delights, are also liable to horrible sinking of heart. Because they have gazed in ecstasy within the gates of pearl, they are too apt to make a descent to the land of death shade, and to stand shivering on the brink of hell. I know this, alas, too well. In the times of our gloom, when the soul is well near overwhelmed, it is our duty to grasp the promise, and to rejoice in the Lord, but it is not easy to do. The duty is indisputable, but the fulfillment of it impossible. In vain is it for us at such seasons the star of promise, or the candle of experience—the darkness which may be felt seems to smother all cheering lights. Barnabas, the son of conso-

lation, would be hard put to it to cheer the victims of depression when their fits are on them; the oil of joy is poured out in vain for those heads upon which the dust and ashes of melancholy are heaped up. Brothers and sisters, at such times the unhappy should wisely consider whether their disturbed minds ought not to have rest from labor. In these days, when everybody travels by express and works like a steam-engine, the mental wear and tear are terrible, and the advice of the Great Master to the disciples to go into the desert and rest awhile is full of His wisdom, and ought to have our earnest attention. Rest is the best, if not the only medicine for men occupied in mental pursuits, and subject to frequent depression of spirit. Get away, you sons of sadness, from your ordinary avocations for a little season if you possibly can, and enjoy quiet and repose—above all, escape from your cares by casting them upon God. If you bear them yourself, they will distract you so that your soul will refuse to be comforted, but if you will leave them to God, and endeavor to serve Him without distraction, you will overcome the drooping tendency of your spirits, and you will yet compass the altar of God with songs of gladness. Let none of us give way to an irritable, complaining, mournful temperament; it is the giving way which is the master mischief, for it is only as we resist this devil that it will flee from us. Let not your heart be troubled. If the troubles outside the soul toss your vessel, and drive her to and fro, yet at least let us strain every nerve to keep the seas outside the boat lest she sink altogether. Cry with David, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?” Never mourn unreasonably; question yourself about the causes of your tears; reason about the matter till you come to the same conclusion as the psalmist, “Hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him.” Depend upon it, if you can believe in God, you have even in your soul’s midnight, 10 times more cause to rejoice than to sorrow! If you can humbly lie at Jesus’ feet, there are more flowers than thorns ready to spring up in your pathway. Joys lie in ambush for you; you shall be compassed about with songs of deliverance, and therefore, companions in tribulation, give not way to hopeless sorrow! Write no bitter things against yourselves! Salute with thankfulness the angel of hope, and say no more, “My soul refused to be comforted.”

My main bent, this morning, to which I have set my whole soul, is to deal with these mourners who are seeking Christ, but up till now have sought Him in vain. Convicted of sin, awakened and alarmed—these unhappy ones tarry long outside the gate of mercy, shivering in the cold, pining to enter into the banquet which invites them, but declining to pass through the gate which stands *wide open* for them! Sullenly—no, I will not use so harsh a word—*tremblingly* they refuse to enter within mercy’s open door, although infinite love itself cries to them, “Come and welcome! Enter and be blessed.”

I. Concerning so deplorable a state of heart, alas, still so common, we will remark in the first place that IT IS VERY AMAZING.

It is a most surprising thing that there should be in this world persons who have the richest consolation near to hand, and persistently refuse to partake of it. It seems so unnatural that if we had not been convinced by abundant observation, we should deem it impossible that any miserable soul should *refuse* to be comforted. Does the ox refuse its fodder? Will the lion turn from his meat? Or the eagle loathe its nest? The refusal of consolation is the more singular because *the most admirable comfort is within reach*. Sin can be forgiven; sin *has* been forgiven! Christ has made atonement for it, God is graciously willing to accept any sinner that comes to Him confessing his transgressions, and trusting in the blood of the Lord Jesus. God *waits* to be gracious! He is not hard nor harsh; He is full of mercy; He delights to pardon the penitent, and is never more revealed in the glory of His Godhead than when He is accepting the unworthy through the righteousness of Jesus Christ! There is so much comfort in the word of God that it would be as easy to measure the heavens above, or set the limits of space, as to measure the divine grace revealed in it. You may seek if you will, to comprehend all the sweetness of divine love, but you cannot, for it passes knowledge, like the vast expanse of the ocean is the abounding goodness of God made manifest in Jesus Christ! Amazing is it, then, that men refuse to receive what is so lavishly provided! It is said that some years ago, a vessel sailing on the northern coast of the South American continent was observed to make signals of distress. When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as, “Dying for water!” “Dip it up then,” was the response, “you are in the mouth of the Amazon river.” There was fresh water all around them—they had nothing to do but to dip it up, and yet they were dying of thirst because they thought themselves to be surrounded by the salt sea! How often are men ignorant of their mercies! How sad that they should perish for lack of knowledge!

But suppose after the sailors had received the joyful information, they had still refused to draw up the water which was in boundless plenty all around them, would it not have been a marvel? Would you

not at once conclude that madness had taken hold upon the captain and his crew? Yet as great, dear friends, is the madness of many who hear the gospel, and know that there is mercy provided for sinners, that unless the Holy Spirit interferes they will perish! Not through ignorance, but because for some reason or other, like the Jews of old, they judge themselves, “unworthy of everlasting life,” and exclude themselves from the gospel, refusing to be comforted! This is the more remarkable because *the comfort provided is so safe*. Were there suspicions that the comforts of the gospel would prove delusive—that they would only foster *presumption*, and so destroy the soul—men would be wise to start back as from a cup of poison! But many have satisfied themselves at this life-giving stream; not *one* has been injured, but all who have partaken have been eternally blessed. Why, then, does the thirsty soul hesitate while the river, clear as crystal, flows at his feet? Moreover, *the comfort of the gospel is most suitable*. It is *fully adapted* to the sinful, the weak, and the broken-hearted. It is adapted to those who are crushed by their need of God’s mercy, and adapted equally as much to those who are the least sensible of their need of it. The gospel bears a balm in its hand suited to the sinner in his worst estate—when he has no good thing about him, and nothing within which can be a ground of hope. Does not the gospel declare that Christ died for the ungodly? Is it not a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom, said the apostle, “I am chief”? Is not the gospel intended even for those who are dead in sin? Don’t we read such words as these, “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together in Christ (by grace are you saved)”? Are not the invitations of the gospel, so far as we can judge, just the kindest, tenderest, and most attractive that could be penned and addressed at the worst emergency in which a sinner can be placed? “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money; come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” No qualifying adjectives are used to set forth a degree of goodness in the person invited—but the *wicked* are bid to come—and the *unrighteous* are commanded to turn to God! The invitation deals with base, naked, unimproved sinnership! Grace seeks for misery, unworthiness, guilt, helplessness, and nothing else. Not because we are good, but because the Lord is *gracious*, we are bid to believe in the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and so to receive comfort! Strange that where consolation is so plentiful—where comfort is so safe, where the heart-cheer is so suitable—souls should be found by the thousands who refuse to be comforted! This fact grows the more remarkable because *these persons greatly need comfort*, and from what they say, and I trust also from what they feel, you might infer that comfort was the very thing they would clutch at as a drowning man at a rope! Why, they scarcely sleep at night by reason of their fears; by day their faces betray the sorrows, which like a tumultuous sea, rages within; they can scarcely speak a cheerful sentence; they make their household miserable; the infection of their sorrow is caught by others. You would think that the very moment the word “hope,” was whispered in their ears they would leap towards it at once! But it is not so; you may put the gospel into what shape you please, and yet these poor souls who need your pity, though I fear they must also have your blame, refuse to be comforted! Though the food is placed before them, their soul abhors all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death. Yes, you may even put the heavenly cordial into their very mouths, but they will not receive the spiritual nutriment; they pine in hunger rather than partake in what divine love provides.

Need I enlarge on this strange infatuation? It is a monstrosity unparalleled in nature! When the dove was weary, she remembered the Ark and flew into Noah’s hand at once. These are weary, and they know the ark, but they will not fly to it. When an Israelite had inadvertently slain his fellow, he knew the city of refuge; he feared the avenger of blood, and he fled along the road to the place of safety. But these know the refuge and every Sunday we set up the signposts along the road, but yet they come not to find salvation! The destitute waifs and strays of the streets of London find out where the night refuges are and ask for shelter; they cluster round our workhouse doors like sparrows under the eaves of a building on a rainy day; they piteously crave for lodging and a crust of bread; yet crowds of poor benighted spirits, when the house of mercy is lighted up, and the invitation is plainly written in bold letters—“Whoever will, let him turn in here”—will not come! They prove the truth of Watts’ verse—

*“Thousands make a wretched choice
And rather starve than come.”*

It is strange, ‘tis passing strange, ‘tis amazing!!

II. Secondly, this strange madness has a method in it, and MAY BE VARIOUSLY ACCOUNTED FOR.

In many, their refusal to be comforted arises from *bodily and mental disease*. It is in vain to ply with Scriptural arguments those who are in more urgent need of healing medicine, or generous diet, or a change of air. There is so close a connection between the sphere of the physician and the divine, that they do well to hunt in couples when chasing the delusions of morbid humanity, and I am persuaded there are not a few cases in which the minister's presence is of small account until the physician shall first of all wisely have discharged his part. I shall not, this morning, therefore, further allude to characters out of my line of practice, but I shall speak of those whose refusal to accept comfort arises from *moral* rather than physical disease.

In some the monstrous refusal is suggested by a *proud dislike to the plan of salvation*. They would be comforted, yes, that they would, but may they not *do something to earn* eternal life? May they not, at least, contribute a *feeling or emotion*? May they not *prepare* themselves for Christ? Must salvation be all gratis? Must they be received into the house of mercy as paupers? Must they come with no other cry but, "God be merciful to me a *sinner*"? Must it come to this—to be stripped, to have every rag of one's own righteousness torn away, as well righteousness of feeling as righteousness of doing? Must the whole head be confessedly sick, and the whole heart faint, and the man lay before Jesus as utterly undone and ruined, to take everything from the hand of the crucified Savior? Ah, then, says flesh and blood, I will not have it! The crest is not easy to cleave in two; the banner of self is upheld by a giant standard-bearer; it floats on high long after the battle has been lost. But what folly, indeed, for the sake of indulging a foolish dignity we will not be comforted! O sir, down with you and your dignity! I beseech you, bow down now before the feet of Jesus, and kiss the feet which were nailed for your sins! Roll yourself and your glory in the dust! What are you but an unclean thing? And what are your righteousnesses but filthy rags? O take Christ to be your all-in-all, and you shall have comfort this very morning! Let not pride prompt a fresh refusal, but be wise and submit to sovereign grace!

In others it is not pride, but *an unholy resolve to retain some favorite sin*. In most cases, when the Christian minister tries to heal a wound that has long been bleeding, he probes and probes again with his lancet, wondering why the wound will not heal; it seems to him that all the circumstances point to a successful healing of the wound; he cannot imagine why it still continues to bleed, but at last he finds out the secret. "Ah, here I have it! Here is an extraneous substance which continually frets and aggravates the wound; it cannot heal while this grit of *sin* lies within it." In some cases we have found out that the sorrowing person still indulged in a secret vice, or kept the society of the ungodly, or was undutiful to parents, or unforgiving, or slothful, or practiced that hideous sin, secret drunkenness! In any such case, if the man resolves, "I will not give up this sin," do you wonder if he is not comforted? Would not it be an awful thing if he were? When a man carries a corroding substance within his soul, if his wound is filmed over, an internal disease will come of it, and prove deadly. I pray God none of you may ever get comfort till you get rid of every known sin, and are able to say—

*"The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol be,
Help me to tear it from its throne,
And worship only Thee."*

There must be a plucking out of the right eye and a cutting off of the right arm if we are to inherit eternal life! Foolish, indeed, is he who for the sake of some paltry sin—a sin which he himself despises, a sin which he would not dare to confess into the ears of another—continues to reject Christ! Might I take such a one by the hand and say, "My brother, my sister, give it up! Oh, for God's sake, hate the accursed thing, and come now with me! Confess to Jesus, who will forgive all your foolishness and accept you this morning, so that no longer you shall refuse to be comforted."

Some refuse to be comforted because of *an obstinate determination only to be comforted in a way of their own selecting*. They have read the life of a certain good man who was saved with a particular kind of experience. "Now," they say, "if I felt like that man, then I shall conclude I am saved." Many have hit upon the experience of Mr. Bunyan in "Grace Abounding." They have said, "Now, I must be brought just as John Bunyan was, or else I will not believe." Another has said, "I must tread the path which John Newton trod—my feet must be placed in the very marks where his feet went down, or else I cannot believe in Jesus Christ." But, my dear friend, what *reasons* have you for expecting that God will yield to

your self-will? And what justifications have you for prescribing to the Great Physician the *methods* of *His* cure? Oh, if He will but bring me to heaven, I will bless Him, though He takes me by the gates of hell! If I am but brought to see the King in His beauty, in the land which is very far off, it shall make no trouble to my heart by what method of experience He brings me there! Come, lay aside this foolish choosing of yours and say, “Lord, do but have mercy on me; do but give me to trust Your dear Son, and my whims and my fancies shall be given up.”

I fear in a great many, there is another reason for this refusing to be comforted, namely, *a dishonoring unbelief in the love and goodness and truthfulness of God*. They do not believe God to be gracious! They think Him a tyrant, or if not quite that, yet one so stern that a sinner had need plead and beg full many a day before the stern heart of God will be touched. Oh, but you do not know *my* God! What is He? He is LOVE! I tell you He needs no persuading to have mercy any more than the sun needs to be persuaded to shine or a fountain to pour out its streams! It is the *nature* of God to be gracious! He is never so Godlike as when He is bestowing His mercy. “Judgment is His strange work.” It is His left-handed work, but mercy, the last manifested of His attributes, is His Benjamin, the child of His right hand; He delights to exercise it. Is it not so written, “He delights in mercy”? Alas, alas, alas, that God should be slandered by those to whom He speaks so lovingly! “As I live, says the Lord,” here He takes an *oath*, and will you not believe Him? “As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked should turn from his way and live.” “Turn; turn! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” He even seems to turn beggar to His own creatures, and to plead with them to come to Him! His heart yearns as He cries, “How shall I give you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, Israel? How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim? My heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together; I will not execute the fierceness of My anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God and not man.” O do not, I pray you, be unbelieving any longer, but believe God’s word, and oath, and accept the comfort which He freely offers to you this morning in the words of His gospel!

Some, however, have refused comfort so long that they have grown into *the habit of despair*. Ah, it is a dangerous habit, and trembles on the brink of hell; every moment, in which it is indulged, a man grows accustomed to it; it is like the cold of the Frigid Zone which benumbs the traveler after a while, till he feels nothing, and drops into slumber, and from that into death. Some have despaired and despaired until they had reason for despair, and until despair brought them into hell! Despair has hardened some men’s hearts till they have been ready to commit sins which hope would have rendered impossible to them; beware of nursing despondency! Does it creep upon you today through unbelief? O shake it off if possible! Cry to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to loosen you from this snare of the fowler, for depend upon it, doubting God is a net of Satan, and blessed is he who escapes its toils. Believing in God strengthens the soul, and brings us both holiness and happiness—but distrusting and suspecting, and surmising and fearing, hardens the heart—and renders us less likely ever to come to God! Beware of despair! And may you, if you have fallen into this evil habit, be snatched from it as the brand from the burning, and delivered by the Lord, who loosens His prisoner.

III. Thirdly, this remarkable piece of folly ASSUMES VARIOUS FORMS.

If I were to give a catalog of the symptoms of this disease which I have met with, and have jotted down in my memory, I should need not an *hour*, but a month, for as each man has something peculiar to himself, so each form of this melancholy bears about it a measure of distinctness. I can scarcely put them under various heads and species—they are too many, and too mixed. I think they say a sheep has so many diseases that you cannot count them, and I am sure men have a great many more mental maladies than can be counted. You might as well count the sands on the seashore as enumerate the soul’s diseases! But certain forms are very common. For instance, one is *a persistent misrepresentation of the gospel*, as though it claimed some hard thing of us. Persons have been sitting in these seats, now, for years, who have heard us say and who know the truth of it from God’s word, that all that is asked of the sinner is that he should trust in the work which Jesus Christ has worked out—should trust Christ, in fact. We have in all manner of ways, as numerous and varied as our ingenuity could suggest, sought to show that there is *nothing* for the sinner to do; that he is to *be* nothing, but just get out of the way, and let Christ and the grace of God be everything! We have tried to show that to trust in Christ, which is the great saving act, is *looking* to Him, resting on Him, depending on Him. We have multiplied figures and metaphors to make this plain, and yet, as soon as ever we begin to talk to some of these who refuse to be

comforted, they say, “But I am afraid, sir, that I have never been sufficiently made to feel the evil of sin.” Now, did we ever say that *feeling of sin* was the great saving grace? Does not the word of God put it over and over again that *believing* saves the soul, not *feeling*? Yet these people virtually deny the gospel, and set up another gospel—a gospel of *feeling* in the place of a gospel of *trusting*! “Oh, but,” they will then say, “I have had these desires so many times before, and they have all gone, and I cannot expect that I should be accepted now.” This is another denial of the gospel! They make it out that God will only accept those who have experienced good desires, but never repressed them; they reduce the gospel into this kind of thing—“You who never have repressed good desires, you may come.” But the gospel says, “Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” I could not give you all the shapes and ways in which they will evade and mystify the gospel, but assuredly they use as much ingenuity to make themselves *unhappy*, as the most ardent spirit that ever lived ever used to discover a country or to win a crown!

Another shape of this malady is this—*many continually and persistently underestimate the power of the precious blood of Jesus*. Not, if you brought them to look, that they would dare affirm that Jesus could not save, or that His blood could not pardon sin, but virtually it comes to that. “Oh, I am such a sinner!” And what if you are? Did not Christ come to save sinners, even the very chief? What has the greatness of *your* sinnership to do with it? Is not Christ a greater Savior than you are a sinner? Towering high, the mountain of His mercy is far above the hills of your guilt! Yes, but you do not think so. Yes, and herein you limit the efficacy of an infinite atonement, and so dishonor the blood of Jesus Christ! There are some who will then say, “But I have sinned such-and-such a sin.” What? And cannot the blood of Jesus wash that away? “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.” There is no sin which you can by any possibility have committed, which Jesus cannot pardon if you will come to Him and trust Him, for “the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s dear Son, cleanses us from *all* sin.” Why, believe me, sinner, though your sin is such that of itself, it will damn you to all eternity, beyond all hope—though it is such that could your tears forever flow, not a particle of it could ever be washed out—yet in a *moment* it shall vanish if you do but now trust in that bleeding Savior! There is nothing in your sin that can now obstruct the power of the bleeding Savior; God will at once forgive you. But I know that you will still slander my Lord Jesus, and refuse His comfort. I pray Him therefore to forgive you this wrong and bring you, by His Holy Spirit, into a saner mind, to believe that He is able and willing, and to doubt no more.

Many cast their doubts into the shape of *foolish inferences drawn from the doctrine of predestination*. I do not find that the doctrine of predestination impresses people in the way of sadness in any way except that of religion! Everybody believes that there is predestination about the casting of lots, and yet the spirit of gambling is rife everywhere, and men in crowds subscribe to the public lotteries, which to our shame are still tolerated. They know that only two or three can win a large prize, yet away goes the money, and nobody stands at the office door and says, “I shall not invest my money because if I am to get a prize, I shall get a prize, and if I am not to win a prize, I shall not do so.” Men are not such fools when they come to things of common life as they are when they deal with religion! This *spiritual* predestination sticks in the way of many as a huge stumbling block when they come to the things of God. The fact is, there is nothing in predestination to stumble a man; the evil lies in what he chooses to make of it. When a man wants to beat a dog, they say he can always find a stick to do it with, and when a man wants to find excuses for not believing in Christ, he can always discover one, somewhere or other! For this cause so many run to this predestination doctrine, because it happens to be a handy place of resort. Now God has a people whom He will save, a chosen and special people, redeemed by the blood of Christ, but there is no more in that doctrine to deny the other grand truth that whoever believes in Jesus Christ is not condemned, than there is in the fact that Abyssinia is in Africa to contradict the doctrine that Hindustan is in Asia! They are two truths of God which stand together, and though it may not always be easy for us to reconcile them, it would be more difficult to make them disagree. There never seems to me to be any need to reconcile the two truths, nor indeed, any practical difficulty in the matter. The difficulty is metaphysical, and what have lost sinners to do with metaphysics? Fixed is everything, from the motion of a grain of dust in the summer’s wind, to the revolution of a planet in its orbit—and yet man is as free as if there were no God, as independent an actor as if everything were left to chance! I see indelible marks both of predestination and free agency everywhere in God’s universe! Then why do you ask questions about your election when God says, “Whoever will”? It is foolish to stand and ask

whether you are ordained to come when the invitation *bids you come!* Come and you are ordained to come! Stay away and you deserve to perish! Yonder is the gate of the hospital for sick souls, and over it is written, “Whoever will, let him come,” and you stand outside that house of mercy and say, “I do not know whether I am ordained to enter.” There is the invitation! Why are you so mad? Would you talk like that at Guy’s or at Bartholomew’s Hospital? Would you say to the kind persons who picked you up in the street, and carried you to the hospital, “Oh, for goodness sake, do not take me in; I do not know whether I am ordained to go in or not”? You know the hospital was built for such as are sick and wounded, and when you are taken in, you perceive that it was built for you. I do not know how you are to find whether you were ordained to enter the hospital or not, except by going in, and I do not know how you are to find out your election to salvation, except by trusting Jesus Christ, who bids you trust, and promises that if you do so, you shall be saved! You may smile, but these things which to some of us are like spiders’ nets through which we break, are like nets of iron to those desponding ones whose soul refuses to be comforted!

I have known others, and here I shall close these lists, who have tried to find a hole in which to hide their eyes from the comforting light in the thought of *the unpardonable sin*. The greatest divines who have written on this subject have never been able to prove anything about it except that all the other divines are wrong! I have never yet read a book upon the subject which did not, one-half of it, consist in proving that all who had written before knew nothing at all on the subject, and I have come to the conclusion, when I have finished each treatise, that the writer was about as right as his predecessors, and no more! Whatever the unpardonable sin may be, and perhaps it is different in every person—perhaps it is a point of sin in each one, a filling up of his measure beyond which there is no more hope of God’s mercy—whatever it is, there is one thing that is sure, that no man who feels his need of Christ, and sincerely desires to be saved, can have committed that sin at all! If you had committed that sin, it would be to you *death*. “There is a sin which is unto death.” Now, death puts an end to *feeling*. You would be given up to hardness, and to incorrigible impenitence; the reason why you could not be saved would be because your will would become fast set against all good, and you never would will to be saved. There is no difficulty in salvation when the will is made right, and if you have a will, and God has made you willing to come to Christ and to be saved, you have no more committed the unpardonable sin than has the angel Gabriel who stands at God’s right hand! If your heart palpitates still with fear; if your soul still trembles before the law of God, and dreads His wrath, then still are you within the bounds of His mercy, and the silver trumpet sounds sweet and shrill this morning, “Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

IV. We will not continue that dreary catalog, but turn to a fourth consideration, namely, that this refusal to be comforted INVOLVES MUCH OF WRONG.

Much of it we can readily forgive, still we must mention it. When you hear the gospel, and refuse to be comforted by it, there is a wrong done to the minister of God. He sympathizes with you; he desires to comfort you, and it troubles him when he puts before you the cup of salvation and you refuse to take it. Now, I do not say that we in our private persons, claim any great respect from you, but I do say that to reject God’s ambassador may not be a light sin; and to cause the man whom God sends to speak words of mercy to you, to go with a heavy heart, again and again to his knees, may be such a sin as will rankle in your soul in years to come if it is not repented of.

But worse than that, you wrong God’s gospel! Every time you refuse to be comforted, you do as good as say, “The gospel is of no use to me; I do not esteem it; I will not have it.” You wrong this precious Bible. It is full of consoling promises, and you read it, and you seem to say, “It is all chaff.” You act as if you had winnowed it, and found no food in it. It is a barren wilderness to you. Oh, but the Bible does not deserve to have such a slur cast upon it!

You do wrong to the dear friends who try to comfort you. Why should they so often bring you with loving hands the words of comfort, and you put them away?

Above all, you do wrong to your God, to Jesus, and to His Holy Spirit. The crucifixion of Christ is repeated by your rejection of Christ; that unkind, ungenerous thought that He is unwilling to forgive, crucifies Him afresh. Grieve not the Holy Spirit—

*“He’s waited long, is waiting still—
You use no other friend so ill.”*

He is the Spirit of consolation, and when you refuse the consolation, you virtually reject Him—reject Him to your shame!

Think, dear friends, wherever you may be this morning—your refusing to be comforted is very wrong because it is depriving the church of what you might do for it. Oh, if you became a cheerful Christian, what another in Israel you might be! I think I hear you sing as the virgin did of old, “He has remembered the low estate of His handmaiden.” How would you rejoice with Hannah that, “He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with princes.” How would your exultant Psalm go up to heaven, “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.”

The world—what a wrong you are doing to it! Why, that part of the world which comes under your influence is led to say, “Religion makes that woman miserable; it is *religion* which makes that man so sad.” You know it is not so! But they put it down to it—they say, “Religion drives people mad.” I would sooner lose this right hand, and this right eye, too, than have such a thing said of my religion! I cannot bear, when I do anything wrong, that men should say, “That’s your Christianity.” If they lay the blame on *me*, who so well deserves it, then let me bear it! But to lay it on the cross of Christ—oh, this makes a man shudder!

V. I will close with this remark—that **SUCH A REFUSAL SHOULD NOT BE PERSISTED IN.**

It is unreasonable to be sad when you might rejoice; it is *unreasonable* to be wretched when mercy provides every cause for making you happy. Why are you sad, and why is your countenance fallen? If there were no Savior, no Holy Spirit, no Father willing to forgive, you might go your way and put an end to your existence in despair; but while all this divine grace is ready for you, why not take it? One would think you were like Tantalus, placed up to his neck in water which, when he tried to drink, receded from his lips—but you are in no such condition. Instead of the water flowing *away* from you, it is rippling up to your lips! It is inviting you but to open your mouth and receive it!

While it is unreasonable to continue such persistence, it is also *most weakening* to you. Every hour that you continue sad, you spoil the possibilities of your getting out of that sadness; you are dissolving the strength even of your bodily frame; and as for your *soul*, the pillars are being shaken.

And, mark you, it is most dangerous too, for maybe—oh, I pray God it may not be!—it may be that God, who gives you light when He sees you shut your eyes again, will say, “Let his sun be darkened, and his moon be turned into blood; the creature which I made for light rejects it, and no light shall ever come to it, even forever.” The King who kills the fatlings, and makes ready the feast, and brings you to the table, if He sees you still refuse to partake, may swear in His wrath that you shall not eat of His supper. I have known parents, when their children cried for nothing, take care to give them something to cry for, and maybe, if you are miserable when there is no cause for it, you may have cause for it—a cause that will never end! Oh, by the blood and wounds of Jesus, by the overflowing heart of God, by the eternal promises of divine grace, by the covenant which God has made with sinners in the person of His Son, by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, put not from you the consolation which God provides; say no longer, “My soul refuses to be comforted”; but cast yourself at Jesus’ feet and trust in Him, and you are saved! God bless you and grant this prayer for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

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